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Turkish bases called not vital

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Washington—Melvin R. Laird, the former Secretary of Defense, said yesterday that United States bases in Turkey are important intelligence centers but not monitors of strategic arms agreements with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Laird drew a sharp distinction between other forms of intelligence about the Soviet Union and verification of current and future strategic arms limitation treaties—the so-called SALT agreements.

Some officials of the Ford administration have encouraged speculation that the bases—now immobilized by Turkish order—are critical to verification of a new SALT agreement now being negotiated.

Mr. Laird declared otherwise in a conversation with reporters. Pounding a table for emphasis, he said he never would have recommended the first SALT agreement in 1972 if "we had been dependent on a third country for verification." He was defense secretary for four years under former President Nixon.

Without specifying the kinds of intelligence available through the bases, Mr. Laird acknowledged their importance. Among other things they are known to monitor Soviet missile tests.

The so-called SALT I agreement of 1972, which froze missile force levels, is concerned with tests only in a secondary way. Now SALT II negotiations, concerned with the quality of weaponry more than quantity, are bogged down despite the goal of reaching an agreement this year.

"We don't need Turkey to verify a SALT agreement," Mr. Laird said. "U.S. interests are not protected if we have to depend on a third country." For the most part verification is carried out through satellite reconnaissance.

The administration will try again next month to get the bases reopened by convincing Congress to restore military sales to Turkey. Turkey closed the bases a month ago after Congress stopped sales because of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus last year.

On the broad subject of strategic arms negotiations, Mr. Laird said a new agreement with the Soviet Union is "to the advantage of the United States." Otherwise he held out the prospect that the U.S. will fall behind in nuclear technology because of vast Soviet expenditures for research and development.

But he said the next treaty must be worked out in detail to leave no misunderstandings. Indeed, as one who has accused the Soviet Union of cheating on SALT I, Mr. Laird called generally for greater care and precision by the U.S. in pursuit of détente.

The former secretary, an occasional adviser to President Ford, noted with approval that both the President and Henry A. Kissinger, the Secretary of State, have warned Moscow against interfering in Portugal's chaotic politics.